# Grammar Accuracy, Language Threshold Level, and Degree of Bilingualism in the Saudi EFL Learner's Interlanguage

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## Abstract

*As Second language learning (SL) process begins, a new linguistic system called interlanguage, starts to shape up in the learner's perception, and bilingualism starts to exist. More exposure to the target language (TL) leads to better knowledge of its grammatical system, less dependence on the mother tongue (L1), more symmetrical interlanguage, and more balanced bilingualism. To ascertain how those sizes interact in the SL learning process, the present cross-sectional study aims at investigating the English grammar global accuracy of the Saudi foundation students at the English Language Institute, King Abdul Aziz University. Grammar accuracy displays the degree of L2 competence, amount of bilingualism, and the level of language threshold in Cummins' (1976) terms. The videotaped oral presentation tests of 50 students', science-oriented and arts-oriented were transcribed, segmented in AS-Units, and their grammar errors were identified, described, and analysed in number, percentage, and frequency. The test consisted of two modes of speech: monologue prepared by the students, and a dialogue as an elaboration on the topics already prepared and exposed. The findings have revealed that Saudi EFL learner's language is grammatically not very accurate and strongly influenced by L1 norms, revealing serious lack of awareness of both lexical and morphological grammar features in both L1 and L2, low L2 threshold level, and a meagre level of bilingualism.*

***Keyterms:*** Grammar global accuracy, language threshold level, degree of bilingualism.

## 1. Introduction

Learning a second language is a process of gradual acquisition of a new language system, a build-up of interlanguage that can start with the first alphabet and expectedly ends withlanguage command and competence that leads to a balanced bilingualism. The more SL learners acquire and practise the L2, the higher level of proficiency they will attain and less dependent on the L1 they will grow. So,awareness of the L2 grammatical norms implies that the automatic comparison between the grammar of L1 and L2 will disappear as each language norms will be fully present in the interlanguage system. In this respect, Cummins (1979) asserted that when the language threshold is minimum, the L2 is still in its primary stages, and the learner is still dependent on their L1 in interpreting and producing the L2 grammar. However,whenthe L2 learning process has advancedto the level that learner has gained enough knowledge of L2 norms, there will be no more L1 dependence, and language threshold will grow medium.At an early stage of SL learning,language errors aresupposed to be interlingual, where the L1 norms still have astrong influence in the production of L2 grammatical system. However, as the SL learning advances, those errors will be restricted to the L2, showing development in acquisition, andthe L2 grammar production becomes more L2 norm-bound.

The present study investigates the level of grammar accuracy in the language of the Saudi EFL foundation students after nearly 7 years of exposure to English as a foreign language; 3 intermediate, 3 secondary, and almost 1 at university. The aim is to take a snapshot of the learners' proficiency level manifested in the amount of accuracy and awareness of the L2 norms. A special focus is going to be onthe types of L2 grammar errors; whether they are interlingual or interlingual. The results would certainly reflect the level of L2 proficiency, the L2 threshold level, and the amount of bilingualism achieved after that long time of exposure to L2.As it investigates thegrammar global accuracy, every grammar error recorded is counted to shape up the TL profile of the learners under study. For the sake of more objectivity of investigation, discreet measures are adopted. The oral output of the videotaped oral presentations was transcribed and segmented into AS-Units.

Similarly,every grammar error detected was analyzed, categorized into types and procedures, and then counted in numbers and frequencies to comprehensively explore the learners' L2 grammar competence.The grammar global accuracy approach adopted in the present study is comprehensive enough to capture the learner's general awareness of the L2 norms as it can be measured form different perspectives; percentage of error-free speech (Skehan & Foster, 1999), percentage of target-like use of plurals (Crookes, 1989), error-free AS-units (Lambert &Engler, 2007), the number of errors per 100 words (Kuiken&Vedder, 2007), and the number of error-free clauses (Guará-Tavares, 2008).

## Grammar Definition

The term grammar or the system of a language as investigated in this studysubsumes both the structure ofwords and the syntactic relationships between them, adopting the definition of grammar as "the whole system and structure of a language usually consisting of morphology and syntax (including inflections)"Oxforddictionaries (17 April 2017).In a restricted sense, the term refers only to the study of sentence and word structure (syntax and morphology), excluding vocabulary and pronunciation. (Encyclopedia Britannica).

## Grammar in Communication

Grammar is an important language feature upon which the meaning and interpretation of oral messages are based. It has been found in the literature that there is a positive correlation between grammar knowledge and the level of accuracy in communication. For instance,Widdowson (1990) claimedthat during communication, attention is given to communicative economy and meaning.  That is, the language structure establishes the clarity and meaning of the message delivered. In this respect, it would be significant to point out that grammar proficiency threshold (Cummins 1979) is the proper reflection of the whole language threshold level. As the grammar accuracy is low, the learner's faulty inferences are based on their L1 system and their L2 knowledge is scarce. However, as the grammar is more accurate, potential errors would be of intralingual types and the amount of bilingualism would be bigger. In fact, multilingual subjects outscored bilinguals in judging the grammaticality of sentences, andbilinguals have also obtained better results in syntactic learning than monolinguals in a study conducted byNation and Newton(2009). Similarly, Homburg (1984) contends that errors are also better categorized in terms of their communicative effect. Beyond that, semantic decoding is naturally based on syntactic processing so that comprehension takes place (Nation and Newton 2009). More proof of the grammatical significance in assessing language competence, Adams (1980) investigated the global speaking score (e.g., on a scale of 1 to 5), by analysing overall score data drawn from test performances in various languages, and found that grammar and vocabulary were the main discriminating factors. Obviously, regardless of the sort of the language error, grammar accuracy prevents both communication breakdown and speech act misinterpretation.

Measuring grammar accuracy is more precisely labeled as a measure of the speaker's orientation toward accuracy (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005, pp. 149-150). On the other hand, operationalizing accuracy by performance on specific forms is misleading as it does not give a representative picture of the student's overall use of the language thus may not reliably represent the learner's broad grammar accuracy, as certain grammatical features might be easier or more difficult depending on the task (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005, p. 151).Different topics may seem to encourage different grammatical forms. However, as the topics were chosen by the learners themselves in the present study, they are not a source of pressure or specific forms elicitation. Therefore, the ability to compare accuracy across topics would be so global. Also, with the learners sharing the same L1, even specific language forms would be dealt with homogenously.

## Objectives of measuring Grammar Accuracy

Grammar global accuracy in instantaneous oral communication has recently been given more attention in research from a wide investigation of methods, ways, and approaches. The aim is to investigate how L1 may interfere in acquiring L2, how the TL structural system plays a determinant role in giving meaning and interpretation of the oral message., and the threshold level at which negative transfer ceases to take place. Therefore, the bigger the degree of deviancy from the L2 norms, the poorer the quality of the L2 (Wolfe-Quintero *et al*. 1998). In other words, the grammar global accuracy is a major tool that measures the degree of conformity to L2 norms.

The L1 interference occurs when the learner overgeneralizes grammar rules of L1 to produce L2 in a negative transfer process(Cummins, 1976). That is, according toLTH, the grammar of the less proficient learner is heavily influenced by the transfer of L1 skills. Besides, there is a consensus among researchers that the main objective of global accuracy measurement is the implication of correct grammar. It is the production the L2correct grammar system which judges the correctness and comprehensibility of that language. Accuracy is the error-free speech that can be attained after proper acquisition and enough practice of L2. So, more L2 acquisition implies fewer grammar errors and lessL1 transfer. In fact, EFL learners need to reach an advanced level of L2 proficiency to be able to use its grammar correctly, leaving no room for L1 transfer (Skehan & Foster 1999). To investigate that threshold level, grammar global accuracy, including both lexical and morphological variables, need to be objectively measured, following the error analysis research steps:collecting samples of learner language. identifying the errors, describing them – local and/or global, explaining them, and finally evaluating them (Corder 1981).

## How to Measure Grammar Accuracy

The present study is cross-sectional, aiming at making more accurate assessments than if it were longitudinal and unable to detect the development of some grammar forms in a straightforward way as those forms develop rather curvilinearly and thus are too misleading to reflect the true interlanguage grammar competence (Ortega 2003).The oral presentation test was meant to be a form of clinical elicitation (Corder 1981) which aims at getting the informant to produce data of any sort in two speech modes preplanned closed task and online planned open task.

The precise discourse features measured in the present study are made up of both sentence and word structure;*nouns, determiners, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, and* conjunctions are discreetly measured (Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) over a length of oral language output. As a Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research, the present study adopts the objective measures based on the Operationalisation of Accuracy (Ellis, 2003: 117; Wolfe-Quintero et al. (1998: 137-144)), error density, types of errors, mean number of errors per 100 words, and errors per AS-Units. That would give account for how the learners' language abide by the TL norms. And the degree of bilingualism displayed in the language quality of the learners under study.

The present study opts for grammar global accuracy approach as it significantly takes all errors into account. In such a way, something can be clearly revealed bout how L2 knowledge is encoded, organized and stored in the brain (Ortega 2003). It also reveals the proper classification of errors; whether interlingual, developmental, or belonging to none of the two. In fact, 'the purpose of accuracy measures is precisely the comparison with target-like use in every oral aspect (Ellis and Barkhuizen 2005).The errors are categorised into omission, substitution, addition, and permutation (Corder 1973) in order to obtain precise accounts of the different aspects of spoken language (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). Those discreet measures of both lexical and morphological grammar were first introduced by Ishikawa (1995) to reveal what the present study is after; *interlingual* or *intralingual* influences and how potential intersection of L1 and L2 is reflected in the oral output. In other words, a major function of the objective measures approach is that it reflects the amount of L1 role in producing L2 (Chen 1998). Furthermore, that investigation will also display how learners lean on their linguistic environment to build L2 knowledge (Ellis 2005) and therefore their language threshold and degree of bilingualism.

### L1 Transfer and Its Effects on L2 Production

L1 transfer amount can affect the proficiency levelof L2 learner. Chen's (1998) study of the role of L1 in SL proficiency level found that L1 transfer appears primarily at the beginning of learning of L2, and it declines as the proficiency level increases. The more the L2 is properly learned and extensively practised, the more it is possessed and easily automatized. As shown in the figure below, language learning starts with the foundation of a new system added to an already existent one. As the L2 learning develops, the L2 system becomes more recognised and independent from the predominance of the L1 norms.

**Figure 1: Foreign Language Learning Process from Novice to Advanced Level**

L1     L2     L1     L2 L1     L2     L1     L2
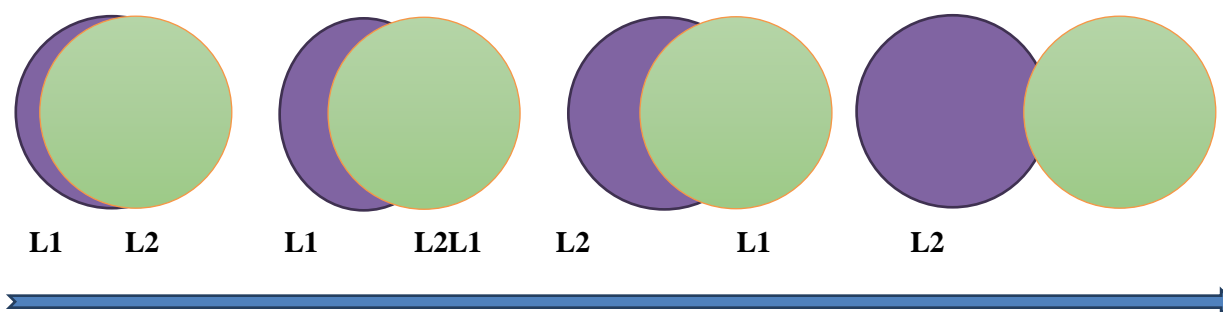
## 2. Literature Review

The acquisition of the TL grammatical system is of a great value because an inadequate knowledge of grammar could severely restrict the scope of linguistic creativity and limit the capacity for communication (Wilkins 1976: 66). In other words, grammar rules are there to enable us to properly "mean" what we say, and without grammar knowledge, it is impossible to communicate beyond a very rudimentary level.  Formal instruction of grammar, in Ellis's (1990: 36) terms refers to "the attempt to teach some specific features of the L2 code - usually grammatical features - in one way or another" to equip language learners with necessary language framework. However, in the EFL academic context, where the EFL learner's rare exposure and minimum practice of the TL makes of the language framework explicit, most of grammar rules are taught decontextualized, and therefore easily forgotten. That usually leads to more influence of L1 grammatical norms through which L2 is acquired and produced.

On the one hand, Terrell (1991) presents evidence that direct grammar instruction did not guarantee L2 learners the ability to freely engage in a spontaneous conversation. On the other hand, she demonstrates in her research that grammatical knowledge plays a significant role in the learners' overall language proficiency. Pro-grammarians such Ebsworth and Schweer (1997) strongly believe that knowledge of accurate grammar helps accuracy and speed of L2 learning and acquisition. Her study reveals the strong relationship that grammar has with all language skills (Terrell, p. 56).

The three advantages of grammar instruction are the following: it accelerates learning, affects the acquisition process in the long-term accuracy (Ruiz-Funes, 1999: 521), resulting in higher language threshold level. In the same respect, Salomon (1992) reports that an immersion program in the United States started adopting explicit teaching of grammar after verifying thestudents' inaccurate speech.

Scott & Tucker (1974) studied errors Arabic-speaking students made in their speech and writing, and they found that verbs, prepositions, and articles were major sources of errors. Also, they found that a great number of errorswere caused by the first language interference either through overgeneralization, analogy, incomplete application of rules, or false hypothesis based on limited knowledge of the target language. In the same vein, El-Sayed (1982) investigated the frequent syntactic errors by Saudi EFL learner and his findings supported the claim that mother tongue interference was the prime cause of student errors. With reference to AbiSamra (2003) as well, Arab EFL learners commit interlingual errors more than intralingual ones. Even more, Hachem (1996) found that the majority of errors, especially the word structure, are made under the effect of L1 transfer. All in all, AbiSamra (2003) and Tahaineh (2010) found that most writing errors made by Arab students fall in the category of grammar and syntax and are aspects of L1 interference.

### Theories on Bilingualism

Learning a second language implies the start of bilingualism. With the advancement of a second language learning, bilingualism starts ascending the stages of a ladder; the more you learn of the second language, the more bilingual you become. In the first stages of second language learning, the learner has mastery of L1 and depends on its grammatical system to produce the newly learnt L2. So, L1 transfer is expected to be the main source of

errors. At this level, the learner would only have basic interpersonal communicative skills to conduct a simple conversation often occurring in face-to-face situations (Cummins, 1979). The second level of bilingualism implies cognitive/academic language proficiency (CALP) that entails the ability to deal effectively with study programmes in academic contexts. It is developed in reduced contexts (i.e. the classroom, conferences, seminars, etc.) (Cummins, 1979). At a higher level, bilingualism can be balanced when L1 and L2 are used at more or less the same level.

The threshold hypothesis, as a theoretical description that explains the development of bilingualism, assumes that the learner needs a minimum threshold in L1 to take advantage of bilingualism. Low competence in both languages may have negative consequences. A minimum level of linguistic and conceptual knowledge in L1 properly and easily builds for the acquisition of L2. A major concept of the threshold hypothesis is that for both languages to develop and to have a positive role in bilingualism, they both must be given opportunity of learning and practising individually, socially, and academically. In a word, bilingualism is the ability to use two languages; in oral conversation and communication. It ranges from minimal to an advanced level of proficiency or competence (Ishikawa 199) in two languages.

**Theoretical Framework**

The degree of bilingualism, which reflects the second language learners' language threshold level, is determined by the amount of learners' grammar global accuracy of the second language. To investigate that issue, the present study plans to focus on the following concepts: the Saudi EFL grammar global accuracy that is believed to be the code to meaningful communication, the relationship between grammar competence and language threshold level, and how bilingualism is manifested through thatlanguage threshold level. The research questions are:

How accurate is the Saudi EFL learner's global grammar?

If not accurate, what types of grammar errors are there and the what are the reasons behind them?

How bilingual is the EFL learner under study?

**Rationale**

The present study aims at investigating how L2 grammar accuracy in the language of the Saudi EFL foundation student can reflect the level of L2 competence. It also focuses on whether that competence reveals the L2 threshold level which in return will display the degree of bilingualism the learner under study enjoys. Similarly, the types of grammar errors and their density are expected to account for the way learning takes place and if any L1 has a role in the acquisition of L2.

*3. Method*

According the chart below, there are five accuracy parameters employed based on the accuracy operationalisation of Ellis (2001) and Wolfe-Quintero et al. (1998).

**Table 1: The Grammar and Syntactic Variables Measured in the Monologue and Dialogue**

| MONOLOGUE | DIALOGUE |
| --- | --- |
| Error density | Error density |
| Error free AS-Units | Error free AS-Units |
| Frequency of errors per AS-unit | Frequency of errors per AS-unit |
| Mean number of Error per 100 words | Mean number of Error per 100 words |
| Most common error procedure | Most common error procedure |
| Most common error type | Most common error type |

**Participants**

In order to investigate the level of grammar accuracy in the oral language production of EFL foundation learners, a group of 50 male foundation students were randomly selected. They are all foundation students at King Abdul Aziz University. All the participants were males with a mean age of 20 years. Also, all the learners had almost seven years of exposure to English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia, 3 years in the intermediate school, 3 years in secondary school, and almost a complete year at university.

**Materials**

The materials used in this study are videotaped oral presentation test conducted by an English native-like teacher with his 50 Saudi EFL foundation students. The speaking task consists of two modes of speech: a monologue prepared by the students in advance and a dialogue meant to elaborate for the topic exposed in the monologue. The data collection went through 4 phases: (1) transcribing the videotaped oral presentations, (2) segmenting the transcripts into AS-Units, (3) analysing the grammar global errors and categorizing those errors into numbers, types, procedures (omission, addition, substitution, and permutation (Corder, 1973).

**Procedures**

To achieve the aims of the present study and to verify the hypotheses about the correlation of grammar global accuracy, language threshold and bilingualism, the videotaped oral presentations were transcribed and segmented, and the global grammar accuracy measures - category and type of grammar, both lexical and morphological, were counted in number and frequency in both modes of speech.

## *4. Results and Discussion*

The results will account for the errors recorded in terms of density, categories, and frequency. In this respect, it is important to point out that the language is grammatically inaccurate. More specifically, the level of grammatical accuracy is uneven between the two modes of speech. More accurate grammar in the pre-planned monologue and with more substitution error categories whereas in the dialogue, the online-planned dialogue is less accurate and with the more dominance of omission error category.

**Error Density**

In the monologue, there is a mean average of 169.20 words produced, and thatnumber is high enough to express any idea or describe any scene, event, or a point of view. It reflects a considerable language knowledge, command and proficiency on the part of the speaker whose language repertoire isrich enough to allow for self-expression and for the choice of a variety of topics.Similarly, the density of language production is reinforced by the big number of AS-Units produced in the monologue - 17.42 AS-Unit with 9.5 words per unit. In terms of language quality, the mean number of sentences is 10.68. that number is surprising as the mean number of words can hold more sentences. The AS-Unit is syntactically-based and flexible enough to include even single words (Ellis 2003). Despite that, there are as many as 9.5 words per AS-Unit whereas the ideal number of 7 to 9 words per English sentences in spoken language which is more considered as less complex than the written one.  However, the speakers' interlanguage is better identified after detecting the density and types of grammar errors made in that big number of words produced.

Accuracy wise, the mean number of grammar errors is 20.12 per the average of169.20 words produced.that is11.89errors per 100words.That sizable amount of errors drives the oral language produced not to be very accurate grammatically (Abu-Chacra 2007) given the 10-day period of time provided to the students to prepare their oral presentation topics.Clearly, the considerably dense language produced in the monologue is highly inaccurate as described by Ellis (2003) who defined accuracy as "the extent to which the language produced in performing a task conforms to native speaker norms" (p. 339). That is, the learners' type of interlanguage in this academic context seems to be an accumulation of unrefined TL knowledge over the years. That level of error density displays a lack of TL daily practice, revealing the general status of English academically and professionally. English is necessaryin science majors in higher education but not highly urgent for future jobs. Back in time, teachers of English in the intermediate and secondary schools extensively use the learners' mother tongue as the sole means of communication inside and outside the classroom.

So, a high number of students learn English instrumentally. As a result, the students' type of English is made up of scrambled parts of speech clinging in the mind over the years more than a build-up of language structures refined over the time.

**Table 2: Number of Errors Made by All the Subjects both in the Monologue and the Dialogue**

|  | ELCS | ELCA | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|
| **MONOLOGUE** | | | |
| Mean number of words | 254,13 | 94.43 | 169.20 |
| Mean number of errors in grammar | 28.3 | 11.95 | 20.12 |
| Mean Number of errors in grammar per 100 words | 11,13 | 12.65 | 11.89 |
| Mean Number of Words per AS-Unit | 11.02 | 7.98 | 9.5 |
| Mean Number of AS-Units | 23,02 | 11.82 | 17.42 |
| Mean number of sentences | 13.98 | 7.38 | 10.68 |
| DIALOGUE | | | |
| Mean number of words | 72.21 | 28.19 | 50.2 |
| Mean number of errors in grammar | 12.96 | 7.48 | 10.22 |
| Mean Number of errors in grammar per 100 words | 17.94 | 26.53 | 20.36 |
| Mean Number of Words per AS-Unit | 6.13 | 2.86 | 4.49 |
| Mean Number of AS-Units | 11.51 | 10.10 | 10.80 |
| Mean number of sentences | 4.34 | 0.96 | 2.65 |

In the dialogue, the mean number of words produced is 50.2, exactly 29.67% of the mean average of words produced in the monologue although the dialogue was meant to elaborate on the ideas and topics produced in the monologue. After the speaker gains more confidence in the monologue, his performance is expected to be better, and his language of more quality. However, together with the very few words produced, the number of AS-Units produced in the dialogue is 10.80. that number is misleading as the number of words per AS-Unit does not exceed 4.49, less than 50% of the number of words produced in the monologue. Another strong reinforcement of the poor language performance is the high mean number of error per 100 words. It is as enormous as 20.36. syntactically speaking the number of sentences is just 2.65. Almost the words produced are sporadic.

**Summary**

The language performance is statistically homogenous across the two modes of speech. In the monologue, the considerable number of words produced goes hand in hand with the high number of AS-Units, the mean number of words per AS-Unit, and the average number of sentences. That good quantity of language produced in the monologue raises expectation that equal or bigger number of words will be produced in the dialogue. Accuracy wise, the number of grammar errors was above average.In the dialogue, however, the mean average of words produced is so low together with the number of words per AS-Unit which is shockingly low. There are also a very few sentences produced.At the same time, the number of grammar errors has meteorically risen.That is reminiscent of total lack of language knowledge and language command. An explanation of the many highly thin AS-Units is that they are but answers to questions asked by the interlocutor. Those answers were not long enough to include clauses ended by cut-off points, they are simply short answers; their number is big, but their content of words is slight. That reflects the inability of the learner to produce long answers; clauses or sentences. His answers are limited to single words or phrases.In sum, the preplanned task is more accurate and more productive of words than the online task where the quantity of language is meagre, and the errors are numerous.

**Error Categories**

The error categories: omission, addition, substitution, and permutation serve as a mirror to reflect the type of interlanguage of the learners in this academic context. They also display the types, L2 threshold level of proficiency, degree of bilingualism, and the mother tongue's potential influence if there is any in the production of the target language, English.As shown in the chart below, the mean number of errors is 20.12 in every 169.20 words produced. More specifically, the error procedures in the monologue are ranking as follows:

1)  43.58% of the grammar errors made are substitution errors;
2) 41.77% are omission errors;
3) 9.22% are addition errors;
4) 3.17% are permutation errors.

## Monologue

Clearly in the preplanned task, the monologue, the speaker normally has time to prepare what they want to say and therefore be as accurate as he they can. In such a mode of speech, the substitution procedure was the most deployed.That is, the speaker has time to find the correct grammar structure to convey the message intended. So, the substitution procedure seems highly convenient for more expressiveness in this case. Substituting parts of speech and grammar structures implies awareness of the speakers about L2 grammar rules and entails a considerable L2 proficiency level. Low proficiency level learners do not have richness of grammar rules and a variety of alternative speech parts in their language repertoire.That raises more expectations of having a higher level of L2 competence and a better language performance in the next task, the dialogue.

However, the second erroneous procedure detected in the monologue is the omission one. Although it ranked second, it is not very different in amount from the percentage of substitution. Omitting parts of speech represents lack of awareness, a deviance L2 grammar system norms, and a serious break of the language grammar rules. That claim is reinforced by the erroneous additions which ranked third with 9.22%. Omitting or adding a grammar element represents a serious deviance to grammar norms more than substituting or permuting that element. The oral presentation task is an academic test in which the learners compete to get the best grade. Also, the foreign language learnt in class is standard; L2 dialects and/or varieties are ruled out. So, the high percentage of erroneous omissions automatically implies lack of awareness of the L2 grammatical system and a low L2 grammar proficiency level.

That also leads to two logical interpretations: the learners under study have a low English proficiency level, and the quantity and quantity of language of languages prepared and frequently practiced before the test. Also, the substitution errors that ranked first does not mean richness in alternative parts of speech and grammar structures in the speakers' language repertoires.  Instead, those substitution errors were instances of over generalizing L1 grammar rules.

**Table 3: Error Procedures Reported in the Monologue and Dialogue of All the Subjects**

|  | ELCS | ELCA | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|
| MONOLOGUE |  |  |  |
| Mean number of errors | 28.3 | 11.95 | 20.12 |
| Percentage of substitution errors | 51.02% | 36.15% | 43.58% |
| Percentage of omission errors | 34.34% | 49.20% | 41.77% |
| Percentage of addition errors | 9.75% | 8.70% | 9.22% |
| Percentage of permutation | 3.67% | 2.67% | 3.17% |
| DIALOGUE |  |  |  |
| Mean number of errors | 12.96 | 7.48 | 10.22 |
| Percentage of substitution errors | 63.58% | 24.6% | 44.09% |
| Percentage of omission errors | 43.83% | 75.94% | 59.88% |
| Percentage of addition errors | 24.07% | 16.04% | 20.05% |
| Percentage of permutation | 9.56% | 4.27% | 6.91% |

## Dialogue

In the dialogue, where language production is more spontaneous and more expressive of the speaker's interlanguage competence, the mean number of errors is 10.22 in every 50.2 words produced. As can easily be noted, the language produced in this task is extremely erroneous. More specifically, the error procedures ranking has changed as follows:

1) 59.88% of the grammar errors are omission errors.
2) 44.09% are substitution errors.
3) 20.05% are addition errors.
4) 6.91% are permutation errors.

The language produced in the dialogue is so poor, extremely erroneous, in very few words. In that online planned task, the erroneous omission has become the most dominant. Although the learners had had ten days to prepare an accurate oral language in the monologue, they produced highly frequent erroneous substitutions. Those substitution and omission systematic errors made implythat the learners' language threshold was too low to make them unaware of the TL grammar norms. The dominance of systematic omission errors in the dialogue seems to depend to a large extent on the L1 norms given the fact that there many grammar elements and parts of speech in the L1, Arabic, that are bound morphemes; subject pronoun + verb; preposition + object pronoun; article + noun; article + adjective, etc. Even the third person singular bound morpheme in English "-s"is overgeneralised as plural as "s" of the plural. Besides, it mixes up with the possessive "'s". that new grammar norm has not been well-practiced in the foreign language academic context. In this respect, James(1998) concluded that the lack of grammatical accuracy could be attributable to the restricted chances to produce output. So, the pluralisation norm L1 requires derivation not adding "s", and that makes that grammar rule summarised into one, pluralisation. In the dialogue, the omission procedure dominates all other procedures, and that goes hand in hand with the steep rise in the number of errors and a sharp decrease in the language quality and quantity. Foreign language output, especially in the dialogue, reflects the explicit types of language knowledge that displays errors of all kinds.

**Error Types**

The type of L2 grammar errorisso important that it reflects the way the learner acquires language, potential role of the mother tongue in producing the L2, and the level of bilingualism they are up to.There are four major error types detected in the oral output of the subjects under study: overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete applications of rules and false concepts hypothesized Richards (1971).In the monologue, theerror types are ranked as follows:

1) 25 types of erroneous substitutions;
2) 23 types of erroneous omissions;
3) 11 erroneous additions;
4) 6 erroneous permutations;

Obviously,substitution as well as omission errors are predominant just like wrong additions and permutations; less used and not very different in number.The big number of all errors types together is65 and that is a clear evidence of the great deal of inaccuracy in the language produced in the monologue despite the fact that it had been prepared 10 days in advance.

**Table 4: The Types of Errors Made by the 50 subjects Both in the Monologue and Dialogue**

|  | ELCS | ELCA | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|
| MONOLOGUE |  |  |  |
| Mean number of erroneous omission types | 25 | 19 | 23 |
| Mean number of erroneous Substitution types | 26 | 23 | 25 |
| Mean number of erroneous Addition types | 14 | 7 | 11 |
| Mean number of erroneous Permutation types | 7 | 5 | 6 |
| DIALOGUE |  |  |  |
| Mean number of erroneous omission types | 16 | 16 | 22 |
| Mean number of erroneous Substitution types | 28 | 14 | 28 |
| Mean number of erroneous Addition types | 13 | 6 | 14 |
| Mean number of erroneous Permutation types | 4 | 1 | 4 |

The same hierarchy of error typesof the monologue is recorded in the dialogue; substitution as the most commonly adopted with 28 times while the omission procedure comes second with adopted 22 times, and the addition is the third with 14 times. They all make up 68 types of errors 3 times more than the types made in the monologue given the number of words produced.Surprisingly, with the few words produced in the dialogue, the number of errors types in all procedures has grown far more than they were in the monologue. In other words, errors of different types thrived in the dialogue, reflecting the extremely poor and highly inaccurate language produced in the dialogue.

## Error Frequency

In the monologue, the types of errors recorded were highly uneven; some types are very common while others are common, and yet others are less common as indicated in the chart below. In this respect, it is significant to point out to the fact that the ranking of the erroneous procedures measured in the chart above is a variable different from the extent to which singletypesof error are common regardless of the procedure they belong to. In a word, the commonality of error types is not consistent with the commonality of erroneous procedures.

### Omission of Article

Although the most dominant error procedure is the substitution, the incomparably most common error type recorded is the omission of article with a mean average of 3.3errors *i.e. bobulation 4 million beoble*K. H. R1. That is very expected of the learners whose proficiency level in the target language is low and whose interlanguage is still fully based on the grammar system of their mother tongue. Furthermore, the omission of article is a predicted error as the definite article in Arabic (*al-*) is bound morphemei.e. *(Altakshaaralyawm = the weather is hot today)* and the indefinite article is implicit in Arabic, the learners' mother tongue i.e. (*London madeenakabeera = London (is) (a) big city*). The omission process is by the fact that indefiniteness in Arabic is marked by the absence of the definite article (Schulz, 2004). In the same line,Elgibali (2005) compared the article status in both languages; "in English, the indefinite article is used with the countable noun in the singular form whereas in Arabic there is no indefinite article".This aspect was reinforced in the finding of Alhaysony's (2012) analysis on errors committed by Saudi female EFL learners in their use of articles in their written samples. The conclusion was that L1 interference negatively affected the process of foreign language acquisition of the articles.

### Substitution of Countable and Uncountable Nouns

The second most common error made in the monologue is the erroneous substitution of countable and uncountable nouns. Such error is not developmental as it abides by a system already established in the interlanguage of the learner i.e.***Fast food are expensive*** TH. GH. N1. Fast food in Arabic is a plural noun. So, Arab learners of English tend to pluralizeuncountable nouns as it suits their L1 system. Count ability of nouns is not homogeneous between the two languages L1 and L2; many uncountable nouns in English are countable in Arabic i.e. *(population, information, fast food)*. In other words, as they intersect, interlingualfactors affect learners' second language perception.

### Omission of Copula

The third most common error in the monologue is the omission of copula with a mean average of 1.7errors i.e.***My number ID 0908371*A. F. R1**. That is another major systematic error that is clearlyL1 negative transfer-based. Back to Arabic, the learners' mother tongue, the copula is implicit. In the same line, (Keshavarz (2006) made it clear that there is no explicit copula as an independent morpheme. For that reason, Arabic EFL learners have to struggle to distinguish between the grammar norms of their L1 and TL. Such an elliptical syntactic element in Arabicis negatively transferred into English, causing a syntactic gap. In the same respect, Butler-Tanaka (2000) were more specific about that when they claimed that the omission of the copula is more frequent in the present tense than in other tenses. Just like Arabic (Abu-Chacra 2007) who said that Arabic does not have the copula in the present tense.

### Misuse of Singular and Plural Forms

The three other most common errors are the following. First, the misuse of singular instead of plural formsis the fourth most common error with a mean average of 1.4 i.e. and then continue the (0.7") two packet (1.7") in a day S. M. U2.

This particular error seems different in nature from the others. The lack of providing the plural suffix "-s" to the word "packet" can be interpreted on more than one basis. First, the grammar system of the TL is not well-applied where the learner is still not aware that the regular plural forms in English need the suffix "-s" in a three morphological forms' "-s", "-es", and "-ies". In this case, the error is developmental although it displays a basic gap in the TL knowledge on the part of the learner who shows a low level of L2 competence. It can also be interpreted as an inference based on L1norms where the number and the noun i.e."two + packets" are not two free morphemes in Arabic. They are rather two morphemes bound together in a single word.So, once the learner,with a rare exposure to L2, finds them as two free morphemes, they resort to apply the rule of L1 related to the number; dual numbers in Arabic are bound morphemes making up one compound morpheme (*Waladain= two boys*).In numbers,from 3 till 10, the noun is pluralized i.e. (nine boys) whereas numbers from 11 and above, the plural nine takes a singular form (*ih'daacharwalad=eleven boy*s) as the number is enough to convey pluralisation. (i.e. forty man) although the number is not above 10. Unlike in English, there is no irregular plural in Arabic. So, with a lack of competence in English, the errors like (three mans; elven man) are well-expected.

## The Substitution of Tense

Second, tense is the fifth most common with a mean average of 1.4, tense with an average of 1.34 i.e. ***It starts {fe (0.2")} from (0.6") seventeenth century until now*** Y. H. A4. The verb was not conjugated into the present perfect although the adverb of time requires that. Tense wise, there is a big difference in conjugation rules between Arabic and English. There are only two tenses in Arabic; the perfect (the past) and the imperfect (the simple present and simple future). However, there are 9 tenses in English; the perfect, the prefect progressive, and the simple that go with the past, the present, and the future. This goes hand in hand with Abu-Chacra (2007) conclusion that most Arab EFL students have difficulties in the use of English verbs due to the absence of verb conjugation in Arabic. The perfect type of tense is implicit in Arabic. At the same time, morphologically, the perfect tense in English requires a helping verb "had" for the past, "have or has" in the present, and "will have" for the future. That grammar rule does not have an equivalent in Arabic. Moreover, the helping verb that does that job is not available as a grammar entity in Arabic. In the same respect,AbiSamra (2003) found that tense errors are very common among Arab students as there is no time sequence in their language.

## The Subject-Verb (SV) Agreement

The sixth most common error is the subject-verb agreement with an average of 1.32 errors i.e. most people in Abhais working H. N. U2. This type of systematic error raises a major issue about the type of English the learner that instills in the learner's mind. First of all, the third person suffix "-s" is very confusing given the rare exposure to the TL as a foreign language. The suffix "-s" is mostly acquired and digested as a signal of the regular plural form suffix that can only be added to nouns but not to verbs as the students is more familiar with it in that function that was learnt first at the basic level and kept unpractised.That is reinforced by the fact that there is no suffix in the learner's mother tongue that hasone form but plays more than one function.That is, the pluralisation function of that suffix which is first learnt is the one that will remain the basic norm that the learner has to abide by, and it is even more potentially digestive in the learner's mind as it has a clear function in the learner's L1, pluralisation. On the opposite, there is no suffix in the learner's L1 that plays the function of a third person singular in the present simple and that is applied to singular subjects as ***he, she, it*** in English.However, it is challenging for the learner whose exposure to the TL is rare to accept a second very different function of the same suffix, let alone a third. The suffix "-s" declares the regular noun plural but hard to accept the same suffix added to a verb in the present simple to declare that the subject is singular.

The second function opposes the first. How it declares the plural form when added to a noun and singular when ween added to a verb in the present simple. What makes the suffix more confusing is the apostrophe s, 's", added to a noun to signal possession. Indeed, many students cannot clearly distinguish between the suffix "-s" and apostrophe "s" due to their similar forms, varied functions, lack of equivalents in the mother tongue, and lack of practice. As for the helping verb used in the present continuous,the singular form "is" is the commonly used one to the extent that it is over generalised to include both the singular and the plural, and the present and the past tense. In other words, most the learners tend to usethe singular helping verb "is" more often with both the singular and plural subjects and in both the present and the past continuous tenses. The plural form of the helping verb "are" is kept undigested by the majority ofthe learners in this academic context.

A possible interpretation of such a grammatical behaviour is the way conjugations are derived in Arabic; all verb derivations occur partially in Arabic i.e. (yadhhabu (goes), dhahaba (went). On the opposite, the conjugation of irregular verbs produces completely new forms. So, the subject-verb agreement is most the time plural nous used with the singular helping verb "is" not the other way round.

## Omission and Substitution of Prepositions

The seventh and eight most common errors are related to the same function word – preposition. A mean average of 1.06 wrong preposition and 0.96 erroneous omissions of preposition. The grammar element is the same yet the types of error are two: substitution and omission. The learner either carries out a wrong substitution of prepositions a*nd then continue two packet in a day* S. M. U2or omits it all together*where they get the money?* Y. H. U2. In Arabic, there are 21 prepositions (mawdoo3.com), however, in English, there are about 150 prepositions (Koffi 2010). Also, one preposition in Arabic can have three equivalents in English i.e. the preposition of time(fi = in, on; at).So, a major part of this dual errors of preposition is morphological and no one to one relationships of prepositions across the two language L1 and L1; some prepositions have equivalent in the other language while others do not.In this case, the EFL learner may not be aware of grammar rule restrictions given the polysemous nature of the English prepositions that account for those dual errors (Koffi (2010, p. 299). Furthermore, most prepositions in Arabic are free morphemes if they are followed by nouns (minAhmad = from Ahmad) and bound morphemes they are followed by pronouns ( minho = from him). However, in both cases, they are always free morphemes in English. Back in the literature, Scott and Tucker(1974) study of preposition found that errors ranked second but in (Mukattash's (1981) they ranked fourth among general grammatical errors.Those two ranks showed the grammatical challenge faced by the Arab EFL learner in acquiring and producing English prepositions, especially at the beginning of the FL learning process. To be more specific,Abu Chacra (2007) claims that simple prepositions were incorrectly used very frequently by Arab learners of English due to the transfer of Arabic prepositional knowledge to English. In sum, the finding in the present study echoed AbiSamra (2003) assertion that interference from learners' mother tongue was the main cause of errors.

**Table 5: Most Common Error Types Reported both in the Monologue and Dialogue of the Fifty Subjects**

| Monologue | Dialogue |
|---|---|
| **The most common error types** | |
| 3.3 Omission of article | 1.2 omission of copula |
| 1.7 Count vs. uncountable nouns | 1.18 omission of article |
| 1.64 Omission of copula | 1.06 omission of subject |
| 1.4 Plural vs. singular (regular plural) | 0.74 substitution of tense |
| 1.34 Tense | 0.64 omission of preposition |
| 1.32 SV | 0.56 addition of article |
| 1.06 Wrong Preposition | 0.56 substitution of plural with singular |
| 0.96 Omission of a preposition | 0.52 omission of conjunction |

The dialogue is more expressive of the learner's L2 knowledge and interlanguage make-up as it is online language planning, coding, formulation, and production.It is so spontaneous that the speaker does not havemuch time tore think, edit, or elaborate the language to be produced. As such, that online task in the oral presentation under study is characterized by four important facts: the grammar errors were obviously more frequent than in the monologue given the number of words produced, and the overwhelming category of errors is the omission with 71.21% of all errors in the dialogue.The omission category is an explicit break of the L2 norms as it drops whole entities; lexical or morphological grammar elements. The big density of errors is accompanied with poor quality of language; no sentences or clauses.Furthermore, the conscious explicit knowledge did not help the speakers to produce The EFL learners' explicit language knowledge takes care of the rules of grammar at the expanse of language elaborateness yet a high density of errors was recorded. That implies that the EFL learners under study are not yet either aware of the TL grammatical norms or developed some implicit language knowledge as their conversations did not reflect smooth flow of words and elaborate language.

## Discussion

Committing errors while learning a second language is something natural in the process of L1 and L2 interaction (Tahaineh, Y. (2010). The language learner's brain already follows certain language norms while getting acquainted with new ones, comparing them to the ones already established, and building a new language to be part of the learner's interlanguage system. As the human brain is naturally a pattern seeker, it is expected to go through a lot of path bumps; the errors resulting from differences in the two language systems; SVO versus VSO, functional bound morphemes versus functional morphemes, etc. therefore, making mistakes implies awareness of differences, and a competition between two systems for adoption in L2 production. The more exposure and practice of L2, the more recognition of its system. So, errors at the beginning of L2 learning takes different procedures according to the type of the error itself;lexical or morphological, and which grammar element that represents a clear systematic difference between the two languages.True, committing errors provides us with a picture of the linguistic development of that learner at a certain point of language learning, but they also reflect lack of awareness of L2 grammatical system (Ellis, 2003). The monologue, as a closed task and a major part of the oral presentation, was prepared in advance and was a closed task, yet there was still a great deal of deviance from the TL grammatical norms. Even more, the oral presentation was a formal academic test where the speaker is in a competition for the best grades, yet the language produced is highly inaccurate and strongly influenced by L1 knowledge (James 1998). The types of errors are negative-transfer based and basic after nearly seven years of exposure to English as a foreign language.

In the dialogue, the flow the language produced is not smooth and clearly poor in quantity and quality. The very few words produced were too sporadic to build up to a syntactic unit. Similarly, that oral output was full of systematic errors. So, the lack of automaticity indicates that the type of language knowledge is not implicit(Ellis 2005). Maybe the lack of automaticity reflects the attention given to explicit processing. In spite of that, the language produced in the dialogue is more far more inaccurate than the one in the monologue. That seriously implies that the learners under study cannot conduct a balanced conversation in English because they lack implicit language knowledge. Moreover, their L2 explicit knowledge hardly exists in its proper sense. The basic L2 grammar systematic errors shows that the learners do not take advantage of their L1 knowledge (Cummins 1976). The claim that L1 grammar transfer operates differently at different stages of the TL learning (Behjat and Sadighi 2010) seems not to apply in the context being studied as the L1 transfer is still in its basic level in spite of the seven years of learning English.

## Errors Categories

The identification and categorization of errors reveal the types of inadequacies in the learners' interlanguage (Ellis, 2005) and the amount of L1 in L2 production (Cortes, 2006). The category of the error gives an insight into the way the learner thinks of and considers that grammar element. The two major error categories in the monologue are the substitution and omission whereas in the dialogue the omission category comes first followed by the substation. The alternation of the two error categories depends very much on the dimensions of each mode of speech. For example, the monologue is pre-planned closed task and prepared in advance, so the speaker has enough time to prepare, edit, and practice the language. The time available is enough to produce the grammar element required or at least to find an alternative to it. That is how the erroneous substitution occurs. It reflects awareness of the requirements of the L2 grammar norm in question i.e. article, preposition, countable nouns, etc. A more severe error category is the omission.It reflects unawareness and strict breach in the L2 grammar norms in both the monologue and dialogue. Such an error category is more frequent in the dialogue as it is an online mode of speech characterized by more time constraint, spontaneity, and open for discussion. So, the speaker of low language threshold level would resort to the easiest procedure, omission, as there is no time for looking for alternatives to substitute with.  As the two language systems are operated in L2 production (Ellis, 2005), the more dependent the speaker is on L1, the more L1 norm dictates which error category required.In other words, the more the two language are different, the more interlingual the grammar errors committed are ranging between forms of overproduction, under production, and miscomprehension (Odlin 1989).

## Error Types

As the types of errors are both local and global, they have a marked effect on comprehension and communication (Ellis, 2005). They are both morphological and syntactic and related to meaning and function words. Although the error types are the same in the two modes of speech, error density is markedly uneven where far moreerrorsoccur in the dialogue than in the monologue. the errors is associated with the lack of implicit L2 knowledge. So, the learners solely depend on the knowledge of the L1 (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005) syntactically and morphologicallyto deliver their oral messages. The omitted lexical and morphological elements depend very much on L1 forms (Ellis, 1994).

## The L1 Transfer

The strong influence of Arabic marked the systematic error categories and types. That is, all the errors made are cases of overgeneralizations of Arabic language system norms. Such an aspect echoes Nunan's(2001:89) statement that "Where the first and second language rules are not the same, errors are likely to occur as a result of interference between the two languages." It is through language transfer theory that grammar inaccuracy reported in the present study can be interpreted. In fact, it is obvious that the TL is acquired by means of applying L1 norms, and that prevents any potential TL mastery. The influence of the learner's L1 is strongly exerted on the acquisition (Ellis 2003) and production of L2.In the Proactive Inhibition PI terms, the effect of prior learning inhibits new learning (Ellis, 2006:174).The L1 transfer is so extensive and both local and global that it implies that the learner is unconscious of that load of L1 interference.Normally, L1 transfer is expected at the beginning of L2 learning (Chen 1999) yet in such an academic context, basic errors have persisted through years of inappropriate foreign language teaching culturetill they become fossilized. The L1 transfer sustainability does not help the learner to improve L1 transfer from global to local.Moreover, they directly affect any speaker's potential L2 command. In sum, the interlanguage of the learners under study is based on L1 linguistic system (Selinker 1972) more than being a bi-system language repertoire of two separate norms.

## General Interpretation

After seven years of exposure to English as a foreign language, the Saudi EFL learner being studied produced highly inaccurate grammar. The errors are both local and global, subsuming lexical as well as morphological grammar. The great error density, especially in the dialogue implies at least two things: the learner is unconscious of the L1 interference and lacks the existence of L2 norms given the long years of exposure. However, second language learning is a process of development in the knowledge of the target language. In each stepupward in the TL knowledge, the types of categories and types of errors become more and more developmental, more local, and less affective of the meaning of the message communicated.

    Proper language acquisition entails the development of L2 implicit knowledge (Ellis, 2005). True, the foreign language is not learned naturalistically as Paradis(1994) asserted yet practicing thegrammatical rules of the target language both orally and in written forms surely helps gradually develop the explicit language knowledge into implicit.Therefore, the learner would be able to conduct a conversation where spontaneous implicit knowledge of the TL grammatical norms is badly needed for proper communication. In this respect, it is strongly asserted that language communicative competence is built on grammar accuracy and competence (Canale and Swain 1980). Given the high level of TL grammar inaccuracy recorded,the Saudi EFL foundation students show a clear lack of communicative competence.Similarly, morphological and syntactic knowledge is very low while it is considered as among the best measures of language proficiency (Ellis 2005). Consequently, the L2 threshold level is very low given the variety of error categories and types, the lack of implicit knowledge, and the inability to conduct a balanced conversation in English.

    The TL production is heavily dependent on the learners' mother tongue grammatical norms rendering it extensively inaccurate locally and globally. Furthermore, the language produced, especially in the dialogue is so minimum and syntactically poor to a large degree. Based on that type of language, it can be safely said that the learners under studyare far from being bilinguals as their knowledge of English is so meagre. Given the length of the period of TL exposure, the learner in this academic context does not show awareness of either the TL norms nor of their counterparts in the mother tongue.

A major step towards a proper acquisition of a second language is to teach the grammar of the mother tongue in detail, and to make sure the learner recognizes all grammatical elements in L1 in form and in meaning. Knowledge ofthe L1 linguistic system; how the lexical and the morphological grammar elements together construct words, make up parts of speech, and build syntactic units of whatever size to deliver meaning, they will automatically recognize the need to recognize their counterparts in the TL. Awareness of the morphological and syntactic entities and their relationships in L1 would automatically imply the need to know their counterparts in L2. That encourages for moredigestion and comprehension of the L2grammatical entities and how they together build the L2 norms. i.e. the lexical and morphological grammar elements, whether free or bound morphemes, how they construct together to make up a syntactic unit. When the second language learner is fully aware of the grammatical entities in L1 i.e. subjects, verbs, articles, prepositions, nouns, and how they together build a sentence, every grammatical element in the TL would make sense in form and function. Moreover, before they acquire L2 norms,the learner would compare the L1 grammar entities, and how they behave to construct morphemes and syntactic units to be able to deliver a message, and how they manifest and behave differently in L2. A conscious comparison of the two norms would help for the acquisition of the L2 norms appropriately. It is the recognition of norms differences that creates motivation for learning. Furthermore, enough practice leads the L2 grammar knowledge to grow implicit.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The Saudi EFL learners need to be aware of the morphological and lexical grammar in Arabic so that they can compare and contrast them with their English counterparts. They require to either learn Arabic grammar appropriately before they start learning English or learn them both in parallel so that they can make the difference. Form-focused instruction Ellis (2003) needs to be in context. As the academic context is foreign, form-focused writing would be very helpful in making the L2 grammatical norms recognizable.Teaching English as a means of communication would be very productive as a great deal of errors can be corrected. Similarly, the EFL learners should not be pushed or encouraged to learn the FL instrumentally and to limit it to obtaining the pass grade.

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